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R 081257Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7200
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 OSLO 000654

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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: NA
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OEXC](#) [PREL](#) [NO](#)
SUBJECT: TURNING THE TIDE ON EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE:
A VIEW FROM NORWAY

¶1. Summary: Faced with a dramatic decline in student numbers over the past 15 years, Embassy Oslo made student mobility and the promotion of U.S. education a top Mission-wide priority. By building partnerships with interested organizations; outreach efforts to alumni, advisors, teachers and students; and aggressive public diplomacy with the support of ECA and EUR/PPD, we are turning the numbers around. Following the narrative are a summary of past initiatives and our checklist for success that may be of interest to the Department and posts facing similar challenges. End Summary.

By the Numbers: A Troubling Story

¶2. Figures from the Open Doors 2008 annual report on international academic mobility show the number of Norwegian students in the U.S. dropped from 2,098 in 2000 to 1,191 in 2006. The number of students earning a full university degree in the U.S. is now one-third of what it was 15 years ago. Laanekassen, the government agency that provides funding for students, reports that 18,939 Norwegians studied abroad in 2006, meaning that the U.S. is capturing only 6.3% of the study-abroad market. Student surveys show that the biggest obstacles to study in the U.S. are the lack of GON funding for the freshman year (the GON only recognizes a three-year Bachelor's degree under the Bologna process; the comparatively complex U.S. university application process; increased international competition for Norwegian students; and the high cost of tuition and living in the U.S.

Building Block: Partnerships

¶3. The Embassy and the Norway Fulbright Commission brought together a broad partnership to brainstorm and develop solutions. The partnership includes representatives from GON ministries and contractors, national research groups, Norwegian-American cultural groups, Fulbright, Norwegian international student organizations and AmCham. Both the Ambassador and the PAO attend the meetings. Each partner has taken responsibility for tasks and reports on progress during quarterly meetings, thereby adding accountability. We also created a Web portal connecting to all Norwegian Web sites offering information on study in the U.S.

Building Block: Alumni

¶4. The Embassy has organized a dozen college-specific receptions over the past year, most hosted by the Ambassador, to help identify and mobilize Norwegian alumni of American universities. The alumni are reminded of their positive experiences in the U.S., have the opportunity to connect with other alumni, and are asked to join one of the embassy's educational initiatives:

--The Speaker Bureau - Norwegian alumni are the best voices to reach young Norwegians. We ask them to visit high schools and civic organizations to talk about life in America and their experiences on

campuses.

--The Mentor Program - Public Affairs works with educational advisors at our partner organizations to match students to alumni based on field of study, institution of interest and possible scholarship experience. This encourages students to keep working through the application process and helps reticent Norwegians brag about their accomplishments in their personal essays.

--Volunteer Counselors - Public Affairs is linking volunteers to ANSA, the Norwegian student advising organization, which will provide them with advising training. An American Fulbright alumna living in Norway is the first to become a trained educational advisor and she visit schools to give presentations on study abroad.

Building Block: Student Advisors

15. Norwegian high school advisors are busy teachers and most have no international or specific U.S. experience. In a trial project, we held an all-day training seminar to acquaint the advisors with the reasons and procedures for studying in the U.S. The seminar included a panel of human resource directors from two of Norway's largest employers to emphasize the value businesses place on an American education. Feedback on the seminar was enthusiastic. We will engage this group with college rep visits and more information, and have scheduled a second seminar for January outside of Oslo.

Teacher Outreach: Frequent and Flexible

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16. The chances of a student considering study in the U.S. are significantly increased when encouraged by an enthusiastic teacher. Last fiscal year, Public Affairs gave grants to support two groups of Norwegian teachers going on study tours to the U.S. To reach more teachers and students through direct contact, we launched a "Visit the Embassy" program and sent American officers to give presentations at middle and high schools. Officers from the Consular and Political/Economic sections, as well as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Ambassador, have participated in these outreach efforts. The U.S. Presidential election proved a topic of great interest and we have had 14 presentations since the start of this fiscal year, also telling our "captive" audiences about study in the U.S. These visits expose the students to an American outside of the television screen and also forge ties with the teachers--some of whom have already become repeat requesters. In the same period, we organized talks with eight different university student groups in different cities.

Student Outreach: Contests and Visits

17. In addition to the outreach to classes, the Embassy as a whole adds a youth element to every possible program. We invited science students to a breakfast with Buzz Aldrin and student leaders to a meeting with Nobel Peace Prize laureates Al Gore and Rajendra Pachauri. We organized student activities for Arbor Day and to celebrate the return of a joint polar expedition, invited 150 students to our Independence Day Event, had a youth component at our Interfaith Thanksgiving, and invited youth groups on U.S. Navy ship tours. We used an essay contest to select participants for the Ben Franklin Summer Institutes and have 4-5 slots reserved for Norwegians to attend the Fulbright Outstanding Student Summer Institutes. This year's Ben Franklin student representative has convinced his school's administration to work with Public Affairs to identify a sister school in the U.S. for class exchanges, video conferences and other joint projects. Our Washington-funded Student Video Diaries competition offered video cameras as prizes for students who wrote the best proposal about how they would use the cameras to document their experiences during their year abroad in the U.S.

Two-way Street

18. It has been important to both promote the U.S. to Norwegian students and also encourage more Americans to come to Norway. This demonstration of mutual respect has paid off by better cooperation and good public diplomacy. The Ambassador and the Norwegian Ambassador to the U.S. traveled for three days across the Midwest visiting schools and promoting both sides of exchanges. This generated energy at the schools and substantial publicity. The Embassy has helped the GON target U.S. schools and connected the GON and the Department of Education to ease federal student-aid accounting requirements.

Building Block: Press

19. Our educational exchange project was launched with a major news conference involving all the partners, including the GON. The Ambassador then traveled across Norway, generating high visibility. We work persistently to place stories on educational mobility in major media, local outlets, college web sites and niche media like Norwegian-American heritage magazines and newsletters. The Embassy has generated surveys showing interest in U.S. study and other issues that have led to media coverage. Because U.S. education is something highly admired internationally, it can prove an attractive story for media.

Building Block: Public/Private Partnerships

10. The Embassy has provided the organization and obtained funding from several shipping companies to convene maritime schools from both nations to a conference where they developed a broad exchange program and potential joint degrees. The Ambassador supported this with a reception for the schools and the funders. An Economic Officer has created several internships for U.S. students in Norwegian law firms and major businesses. The Embassy is working to get corporate sponsors to provide host families for Norwegian high school students to fill a shortage which prevents several hundred willing students from studying in the U.S.

Making it Political

11. The Embassy has worked hard to force the GON to address the dropping student numbers through approaches to various ministries, heads of political parties and interested business and labor groups.

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We also encourage Norwegian groups, such as the student organization ANSA, to speak publicly on the issues. We focus on getting funding for the freshman year and have succeeded in getting it on the political agenda, with all the opposition parties supporting our proposal. We continue lobbying the government; with 2009 an election year, we hope to see our work pay off on this issue. The GON has tried to calm the issue by spending more money on educational exchange to the U.S. through scholarships, grants to promote partnerships, and marketing.

Motivating U.S. Colleges

12. The Embassy has worked to engage U.S. colleges and universities in increased exchange agreements and more recruiting in Norway. The "Ambassadors Tour" discussed above led to the formation by the Norwegian-American Foundation of the "North American Learning Alliance," wherein six schools across the U.S. have agreed to consolidate and streamline application processes and do joint marketing. The University of Minnesota has made Norwegian students eligible for in-state tuition and it added a sophisticated Web portal for interested Norwegian students.

Washington Support Critical

13. Post deeply appreciates the support that ECA and EUR/PPD has given to our educational exchange efforts. Two examples:

--Student Video Diaries: Public Affairs received \$15,000 to support a student competition and video production. We gave video cameras to seven Norwegian students going to high schools and colleges in the U.S. to record their experiences through their own eyes. A special Facebook account lets other students share in these videos, which will be edited into a short promotional video at the end of the school year.

--The new Educational Exchange Coordinator position has been the single most important element in our efforts. PAS could not fight this battle without the funding to support the new staff member.

Results so Far: Momentum and Progress

¶14. Although the various sources of statistics tracking Norwegian students in the U.S. present different numbers, an upward trend is clear.

-- GON statistics track all Norwegian students receiving government funding. In most cases this does not include students in their freshman year or any self-paying students. Tracking only the students on 1-2 semesters exchange programs, reflecting GON priorities, the number went from 580-791 in one year. The combined total of exchange students and full degree students increased 14% in the past year.

-- Open Doors compiles numbers provided by U.S. institutions and includes self-funded students, freshman, full-degree and exchange students. These figures show that Norway sent 1,264 students to the U.S. this year, an increase of 73 students, or 6.1% over last year.

-- Visa statistics mirror these rising figures. Issuance of F-1 student visas increased by 33%; J-1 visas for exchange students and visitors increased 20%; and M-1 visas to non-academic students increased by 72%.

-- The number of Fulbright applicants increased by 30% last year; the quality of the applicants increased as well. In Europe, Norway was bested only by France and tied by the UK in the number of Fulbrighters sent to the U.S. In per capita terms, Norway is by far Europe's leading contributor of Fulbrighters!

Next Steps

¶15. The Embassy intends to boost student numbers by expanding our existing programs and exploring still others, including:

--Student Fairs - Public Affairs is subsidizing a joint booth with Fulbright and other partner organizations at Norway's biggest educational fair. We are also inviting American colleges to participate, including the North American Learning Association (a consortium of six colleges with ties to Norway). We will organize presentations by Norwegian alumni on their alma maters throughout the day.

-- Sports Scholarships - We have identified sports as an area where Norwegians have skills that U.S. colleges appreciate and fund. We are developing a strategy for connecting sports associations and athletes with American coaches and recruiters and creating a sports scholarship information packet for advisors, sports associations and students.

--Advisor Seminars - Given the success of our first advisor seminar, Public Affairs is planning to offer similar seminars both in Oslo and around the country.

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-- Media outreach - We are exploring new ways to take advantage of traditional and non-traditional media to reach untapped audiences. We continue to promote our Facebook group and will arrange a Web chat on study in the U.S. We are looking at ways to collaborate with a local media organization that is hoping to develop a Web page devoted to American educational opportunities.

-- High School Exchanges - Recognizing that high school exchanges also play a positive role in building bilateral ties and in the numbers of students seeking higher education in the U.S., the Embassy is exploring ways to support such programs. In recent years, the number of Norwegian high school students interested in studying in the U.S. has far surpassed the number of available host families. One idea is to ask a large American business or civic network to identify and recruit new host families. If successful,

such an effort would yield another 100-150 Norwegian students traveling to the U.S. every year.

Summary of Initiatives

¶16.

--BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS:

By developing partnerships including the GON, private sector, student organizations and others, we have leveraged resources for the project.

--SPEAKERS BUREAU:

By sending Norwegians and Emboffs to speak at schools, we created opportunities to promote exchanges.

--EDUCATION WEB PORTAL:

Post funded the development of a one-stop-shop Web portal (usastudier.no), with links to our partner organizations, to help Norwegian students find all the information they need to study in the U.S.

--STUDENT ADVISING VOLUNTEERS:

Training volunteers so they can give presentations and concrete help to students.

--STUDENT VIDEO DIARIES:

PAS distributed six video cameras to Norwegian students who agreed to film moments of their educational exchange experience in the U.S. Their submissions are continuously uploaded into a special Facebook account and we promote this group to all students interacting with the Embassy.

--NETWORKS OF ALUMNI CHAPTERS:

By identifying Norwegian alumni chapters of American institutions, Post has been able to recruit returnees to serve as mentors and speakers.

--NEWSLETTER:

Post sends an e-newsletter three times/year to connect people, inform them of opportunities, recruit them for programs and tell them about our programs.

--PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT:

FCS and other sections work with Amcham to build support for educational exchange from business. Public Affairs developed a survey for AmCham business members, to show the high value placed on an American education. An AmCham job fair for returning Norwegian alumni of American institutions is planned.

--NGO INVOLVEMENT:

NGOs serve on our educational exchange task forces. Conoffs attend NGO pre-departure orientations and offer organization-specific visa appointments.

--ENCOURAGE U.S. STUDENTS TO STUDY IN NORWAY:

By making this a two-way effort, we have generated GON support and built ties that contribute to Norwegian students traveling to the U.S.

--PRIVATE SECTOR INTERNSHIPS:

Post is encouraging Norwegian businesses and law firms to offer American students fully-supported internships in their companies and to seek places for Norwegian students in U.S. businesses.

--MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS:

We actively look for ways to promote educational exchange through newspaper inserts, collaboration with education-oriented Web sites, and in setting up Web chats linking students to advisors.

-- WORK WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS TO ENCOURAGE BILATERAL AGREEMENTS:

PAS used a reception for the rectors of all Norwegian universities

to encourage them to improve student mobility. We encouraged them to maximize use of bilateral agreements and also asked the rectors to energize their faculty, either by sending them on an exchange or by encouraging them to find new links with American universities.

--YOUTH OUTREACH:

Using grants, we recruit for summer programs and encourage participation in Embassy events.

-- NORTH AMERICAN LEARNING ASSOCIATION (NALA):

Post is promoting this new consortium of six American universities with strong ties to Norway; they have been invited to exhibit in the Public Affairs booth at an upcoming education fair and we will host a reception for their alumni to mobilize them to recruit Norwegian students.

-- PROMOTION OF SPORTS SCHOLARSHIPS:

PAS is building relationships with sports associations in Norway as a way to recruit for American sports scholarships. We are developing a sports scholarship starter kit and have invited a university coach to come to Norway as an IIP speaker to talk about athletic opportunities in the U.S.

-- MARITIME INSTITUTIONAL EXCHANGE:

We supported the development of a formal bilateral exchange of students between Norway's maritime institutions and four maritime institutions in the U.S.

Our Checklist for Success

¶17.

-- PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

by the Ambassador (weekly task force meetings, frequent speeches).

-- FOCUS RESOURCES

by making it a priority for entire Mission, not just Public Affairs (e.g. Consular and Political/Econ section outreach during other travel).

-- Build YOUTH OUTREACH

into many embassy events.

-- PARTNERSHIPS

with public and private organizations that focus on education.

-- POLICY ADVOCACY

with political parties and government.

-- Use all possible State Department PROGRAM FUNDS

to reach target goals (grants, speakers, etc.).

-- BE VISIBLE

at public fairs, events, giving speeches and in the media.

-- Have a DEDICATED STAFF MEMBER

to manage educational exchange program.

-- ENERGIZE

and unite other STAKE-HOLDERS.

-- SUSTAINED and frequent INTERACTION

with schools, teachers and students.

-- EXPLORE NEW MEDIA:

Facebook and other social networking sites, Web portal, Web chats.

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